



## MEMORANDUM

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**MEETING DATE: March 8, 2022**

**TO: Story County Board of Supervisors**

**FROM: Amelia Schoeneman, Story County Planning and Development Director**

**RE: Request for a full-time administrative assistant II position**

The following memo provides the background and illustrates the need for a full-time administrative assistant position in the Planning and Development Department. Currently, the Story County Planning and Development and Environmental Health departments share an administrative assistant II position. The position is currently open. If approved, a part-time Environmental Health and full-time Planning and Development administrative assistant position would be advertised and filled as soon as possible.

### **Background**

The current administrative assistant position became shared in the same timeframe when the planning department was restructured. The Planning and Development Department previously had a director, two planners, a code enforcement officer, and an office support coordinator. When the administrative assistant position became shared in the summer of 2015, the department had been reduced to one planner and a director. The Environmental Health Department had a director, two specialists, and a part-time administrative assistant position that was open. The Environmental Health and Planning and Development Departments merged offices and began to share the administrative assistant position. The Environmental Health Department previously used the office spaces across the hall from the departments' current office space, where the conference room and offices for the planning interns and watershed coordinator are located.

### **Current position's duties**

Current items the administrative assistant handles that are unique to the Planning and Development position:

- **Scheduling of meetings and completing agendas and minutes for Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Adjustment.** The Board of Adjustment minutes are time-consuming as their decisions may be appealed to court and a detailed record is required. For example, the last Board of Adjustment minutes were 14 pages long. The minutes have required the administrative assistant to work overtime to complete.
- **Payment and intake for all zoning permits and development cases.** Last year, there were 219 permit and development case applications (zoning, 911, agricultural exemptions, conditional uses, floodplain permits, grading permits, sign permits, property research, etc.). This is approximately one application per working day. While Citizenserve (online permitting platform) has been an asset for staff and made the application process easier for most customers, it does require the administrative assistant to more thoroughly review applications prior to taking payment and provide tech support for applicants.

- **Home business permit renewals.** The administrative assistant sends reminders to home business owners and helps them apply for renewal through Citizenserve. There is a biennial renewal of approximately 20 home businesses per year.
- **Scheduling inspections** (approximately 147 last year).

While the position is currently split between the departments, Planning and Development uses more of the administrative assistant's time. For example, twenty-seven of the twenty-nine applications that the administrative assistant oversaw intake of during January were for the Planning and Development Department. Planning's use of the position has had to decrease due to an increase in the frequency of Board of Health meetings and the administrative assistant assisting in Environmental Health's grant programs. With the health department participating in new grant programs, fewer administrative assistant resources will be available to the planning department if a full-time position is not approved.

#### **Need for a full-time position—additional duties**

**In the immediate short-term, the following items were identified that could be completed by a full-time administrative assistant. This would free up several hours of the planners' time weekly and they could focus on completing work program items:**

- Increasing review of zoning permits to include ensuring site plans are complete (setbacks shown, interior plans provided) prior to assigning them to planners.
- Routing conceptual and interagency review materials to county departments and cities (currently completed by planners). This would allow for better tracking of who has comments, what comments are outstanding, and a faster turnaround time for review comments.
- General tracking of development cases. For example, after comments are sent, we often do not hear back from an applicant for several weeks. The administrative assistant could reach out/send a letter instead of a planner and develop a procedure for when we send applications back.
- Sending all notices (planners currently create notices, stuff, and address envelopes).
- Creating templates for common resolution and ordinance types and publications. The administrative assistant could also fill in these templates with information provided by the planners for a case. This is something the planners currently complete.
- Completing findings of fact for Board of Adjustment cases based on staff reports and minutes.
- Posting of internship job (at minimum twice per year, up to four times), coordinating intern schedules, handling employee action forms for interns.
- Assist in gathering data for quarterly reports. This is currently completed by the director but with Citizenserve, an administrative assistant could run the reports needed to compile permitting data.
- Assist in issuance of floodplain permits and tracking of permit expirations. This is currently handled by the director.

**The largest item that could be assigned to a full-time administrative assistant would be the implementation of the department's new Public Outreach Toolkit. Items from the toolkit that could be completed/overseen by an administrative assistant include:**

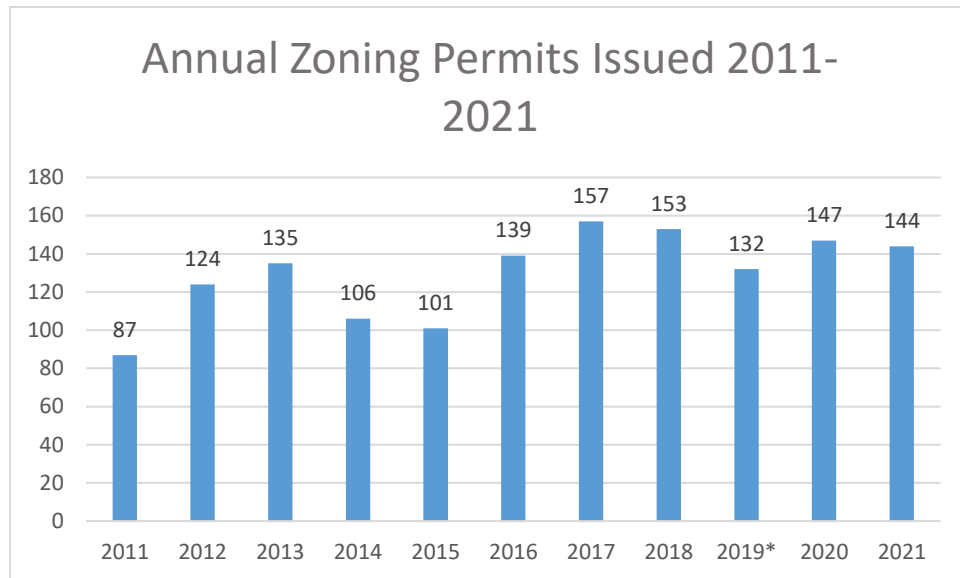
- Citizenserve How-To Videos (how to apply online, make payment, etc.)
- Designing and sending postcard notices
- Maintenance of current projects page and development map
- Social media posts for cases
- Flier design for cases
- Setting up informational meetings for larger cases. For example, making a list of neutral locations and contacts with whom to schedule use of building. Booking locations. Sending notice to property owners. Attending meetings and taking notes.

The department also has several outstanding record-keeping projects. Development case files have not been archived since 2015. An archive of historic cases and regulations is located on an external hard drive that is no longer supported by IT. These need to be reviewed and archived appropriately to Citizenserve, Tyler, or another backed-up location. With a full-time administrative assistant, these projects could be tackled. With Citizenserve, archiving of current cases occurs at the end of a case but is the responsibility of the planners to upload any necessary documents. The administrative assistant could also take this on.

**In the long term, as the department grows, the need for administrative support will also grow.** An item on the department's current work program is the creation of a code enforcement position that would oversee code enforcement for the department and for cities in Story County. If the code enforcement position is created, an administrative assistant would assist in sending notice of violations, tracking deadlines/compliance schedules, taking calls and complaints, and providing other general administrative services. **With the code enforcement position, the department would be back at the staffing level when we previously had a full-time administrative assistant position.**

#### **Need for a full-time position—department growth**

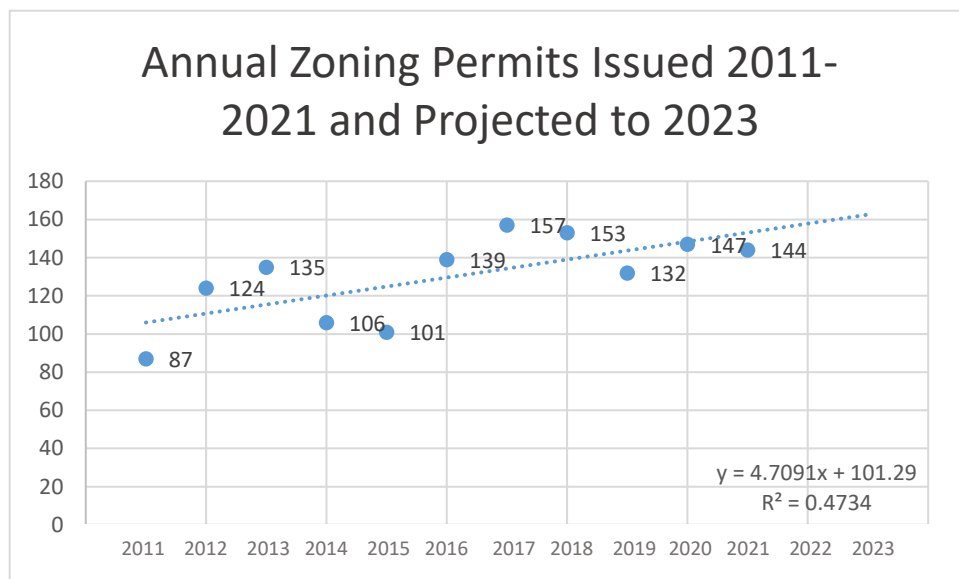
In late 2016, due to increasing numbers of permits and development cases, a new planner position was approved. This growth trend has continued. Figure 1 is the annual number of zoning permits issued from 2011 to 2021. While there has been some variation in years, the second half of the time period (2016 to 2021) has an average of 145 permits issued per year. This is compared to the first half of the time period (2011 to 2016), where there was an average of 115 permits issued per year. **On average, the department has been handling more permits than when we had higher staffing levels. Also, since 2017, the department has taken on floodplain management. This was previously handled by the department prior to the creation of the County Outreach and Special Projects Manager position and department restructuring.** In 2021, 18 floodplain development permits were issued. It would be a great help to the director if after review, an administrative assistant were available to issue the permits and track permit expirations.



*Figure 1: Annual Zoning Permits Issued 2011-2021*

*\*The 2019 number does not include 100 additional permits issued for wind turbine repowering.*

As there was a linear trend in the zoning permit data, staff was able to project the number of permits issued through 2023. Based on the projection, shown in Figure 2, it is anticipated that the number of permits issued will continue to increase. By 2023, it is projected that 163 permits will be issued annually. Again, each permit's intake is handled by the administrative assistant and their role in reviewing permits could be increased if the position were full-time.



*Figure 2: Annual Zoning Permits Issued 2011-2021 and Projected to 2023*

*\*The 2019 number does not include 100 additional permits issued for wind turbine repowering.*

Regarding development cases, while there is less of a clear linear trend, the department is still averaging more development cases in the last half of the 2011 to 2021 time period. The average number of development cases from 2011 to 2016 was 20. The average number of cases from 2016-2021 was 31. The number of cases by type from 2011 to 2021 is shown in Figure 3.

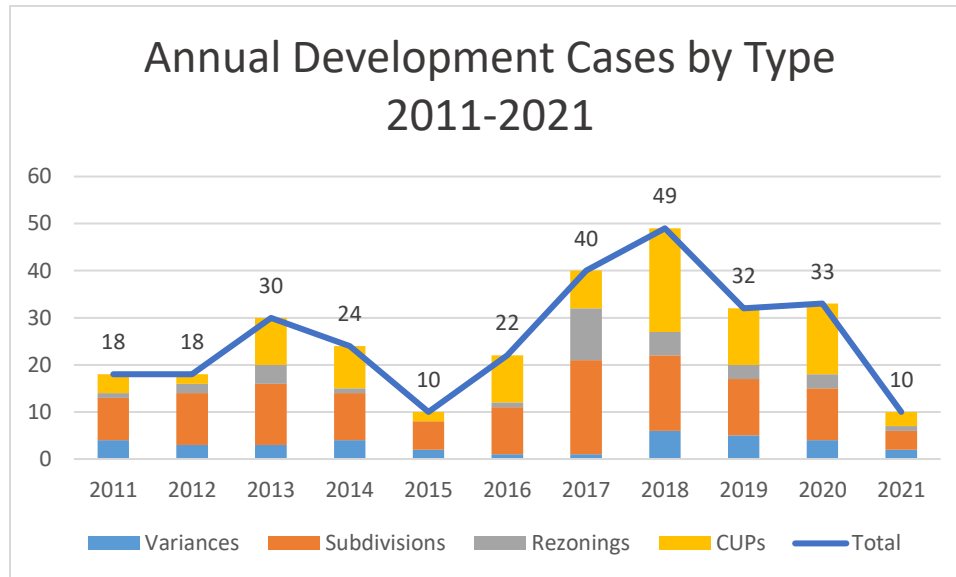


Figure 3: Annual Development Cases by Type 2011-2021

### Need for additional space

**During the space needs assessment process, it became clear that the Planning and Development Office space was not sufficient for the department's current structure or future growth.** All office spaces are currently occupied by Planning and Development and Environmental Health staff. The Planning and Development Department's interns are located in the offices across the hall. It would improve the internship experience to have them located in offices nearer to planning staff.

If the Environmental Health Department were to move across the hall, the interns and watershed coordinator could relocate into their offices. There would also be office space for a code enforcement officer. **Having a full-time administrative assistant would facilitate this reorganization.**

Planning and Development staff discussed this with the Environmental Health Department and Facilities Management. There is an office space for an administrative assistant for all Environmental Health staff in the office space across the hall from the department's current offices. To create a customer service counter and barrier, a new workstation would need to be installed and a wall in the current intern office removed so that the administrative assistant would face customers. The Planning and Development Department Administrative Assistant could assist in providing office coverage if all Environmental Health staff were in the field, at a conference, in a meeting, etc., and the part-time Environmental Health administrative assistant was not in the office.

### Peer County Comparison

Planning and Development contacted and reviewed the staff directories of the top 10 most populous counties in Iowa. We asked for the number of staff, department structure (if they shared an administrative assistant with other departments), and the number of administrative assistants. The results are displayed in Figure 1, including the population of the counties based on the 2020 Census. Polk County is not included as its planning department is combined with its public works department and has over 50 employees and six administrative assistants. After Pottawatomie County, the next most populous county is closer to a population of 50,000 and less comparable. Dallas County's Office structure and duties are the most comparable and they have a director, two planners, a contracted-building inspector, and a full-time administrative assistant.

<i>County:</i>	<b>Total Number of Staff:</b>	<b>Number of Administrative Assistants:</b>	<b>Shared Position:</b>	<b>Population:</b>
<i>Linn</i>	14	1	No	230299
<i>Scott</i>	5	1	No	174669
<i>Johnson</i>	12	1	No	152854
<i>Black Hawk</i>	8	1	No	131144
<i>Woodbury</i>	3	1	Yes (economic development)	105941
<i>Dallas</i>	4	1	No	99678
<i>Dubuque</i>	3	1	No	99266
<i>Story</i>	3.5	1	Yes	98,537
<i>Pottawattamie</i>	8	1	No	93667

Figure 4: Comparison of peer county planning department staffing

### Budget Implications

As the position is currently part-time, half of the cost of the salary and benefits is already included in the Planning and Development Department's budget. **The cost for the other half may range between \$22,172 and \$34,422 more than is already budgeted for the position for the 2022/2023 Fiscal Year.** This includes salary and benefits. If the position were approved, an amendment for this amount could occur at the beginning of the fiscal year.

**For the current fiscal year, there is additional funding in the extra help line item (\$16,786) due to the department's interns typically working 10 hours a week of the 20 hours budgeted. This would likely cover the costs of a full-time, administrative assistant if they began in April.** Using the high end of the estimate for a fiscal year, the cost would be \$8,605 for three months. The remainder in the line item would be sufficient to cover the cost of a full-time intern beginning in May and the intern continuing to work part-time during the remainder of the school year. A second part-time intern during the school year could also be covered.

Again, the Environmental Health department plans to use the current Planning and Development intern office for their administrative assistant with modifications to the space. The cost for the modification is estimated at \$5,000. This amount would likely require a budget amendment to Story County Facilities Management's budget. It may be possible to include this amount in the permanent front counter barriers project being funded through ARPA funds. Staff has discussed this with Assistant Auditor Lisa Markley.

There are also ongoing costs associated with a phone, printing, and other services needed to support a separate position and separation of the Environmental Health and Planning and Development Departments. The printer costs approximately \$750 annually and is shared by the two departments. A separate printer would add \$750 to the health department's annual budget. A new phone line for an Environmental Health Administrative Assistant would cost approximately \$50 per month or \$600 per year. Staff anticipates the office supplies budget (currently split evenly between the departments) to remain the same. For the current fiscal year, this would cost \$337 for Environmental Health (communication and printer costs for three months). For the next fiscal year, this would be \$1,350. Since the department would not be paying half of the benefits of a full-time administrative assistant position, they may not need a budget amendment to cover these costs.

Upfront, one-time costs for the office reconfiguration and new work station (\$5,000), physical phone (\$300), computer (\$850-\$900), monitors (\$400), and credit card pin pad (\$200) to support separate positions total \$6,800. Of the total, \$1,800 will be from Environmental Health's budget for the current fiscal year. Adding the communications services and printing monthly costs, this would be a total budget impact of \$2,100 to the Environmental Health budget for the current fiscal year. The Environmental Health Director has determined that no budget amendment would be needed to cover this amount.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

With the department's current workload and shifting administrative tasks away from the planners and director, there is a sufficient amount of work for a full-time position. While the annual increase in budget costs could be up to \$34,422, a full-time position would facilitate permitting and development cases by providing better tracking. This would improve communication with applicants. A full-time position would also free up the time the planners and director spend on administrative tasks. This would help the department focus on development cases and completing its work program. Finally, with continued permitting growth and the potential to add a code enforcement position, the need for a full-time administrative assistant position will only increase. If the full-time request is not approved, the department will likely need to make the request again when the code enforcement position is created. Approving the position now will create a smoother transition as both the Planning and Development and Environmental Health Departments take on new duties and grow. The department respectfully requests the Board of Supervisors approve a full-time Administrative Assistant II position for the Planning and Development Department.